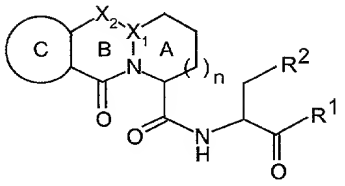
We claim:

1. A compound of formula **I**:



I

or a pharmaceutically acceptable derivative thereof, wherein:

R^1 is hydrogen, CHN_2, R, or $-CH_2Y$;

R is an aliphatic group, an aryl group, an aralkyl group, a heterocyclic group, or a heterocyclylalkyl group;

Y is an electronegative leaving group;

R^2 is CO_2H, CH_2CO_2H, or esters, amides or isosteres thereof;

X_2-X_1 is $N(R^3)$-$C(R^3)$, $C(R^3)_2$-$C(R^3)$, $C(R^3)_2$-N, N=C, $C(R^3)$=N, $C(R^3)$=C, C(=O)-N, or C(=O)-$C(R^3)$;

each R^3 is independently selected from hydrogen or C_{1-6} aliphatic,

Ring C is a fused aryl ring;

n is 0, 1 or 2; and

each methylene carbon in Ring A is optionally and independently substituted by =O, or by one or more halogen, C_{1-4} alkyl, or C_{1-4} alkoxy.

2. **The compound of claim 1 having one or more of the following features:**

(a) R^1 is $-CH_2Y$ wherein Y is a halogen, OR, SR, or -OC=O(R), wherein R is an aryl group or heterocyclic group;

(b) R^2 is CO_2H or esters, amides or isosteres thereof;

(c) X_2-X_1 is N=C, C(R^3)=C, or C(=O)-N;

(d) Ring C is a fused five or six-membered aromatic ring having zero to two heteroatoms; and

(e) n is 0 or 1.

3. The compound of claim 2 wherein:

(a) R^1 is $-CH_2Y$ wherein Y is a halogen, OR, SR, or -OC=O(R), wherein R is an aryl group or heterocyclic group;

(b) R^2 is CO_2H or esters, amides or isosteres thereof;

(c) X_2-X_1 is N=C, C(R^3)=C, or C(=O)-N;

(d) Ring C is a fused five or six-membered aromatic ring having zero to two heteroatoms; and

(e) n is 0 or 1.

4. The compound of claim 3 wherein R^1 is $-CH_2Y$ wherein Y is F; R^2 is CO_2H or an ester or amide thereof; X_2-X_1 is N=C, CH=C, or C(=O)-N; Ring C is benzene ring; and n is 0 or 1.

5. The compound of claim 1, said compound selected from the compounds listed in Table 2.

6. A pharmaceutical composition comprising a compound as claimed in any of claims 1-5 and a pharmacuetically acceptable carrier.

7. A method for treating a condition or disease in mammals that is alleviated by treatment with a caspase

inhibitor, comprising administering to a mammal in need of such a treatment a therapeutically effective amount of a compound as claimed in any of claims 1-5.

8. A method for treating a disease or condition selected from an IL-1 mediated disease, an apoptosis mediated disease, an inflammatory disease, an autoimmune disease, a destructive bone disorder, a proliferative disorder, an infectious disease, a degenerative disease, excess dietary alcohol intake disease, a viral mediated disease, or a disease associated with cell death, comprising administering to a mammal in need of such a treatment a therapeutically effective amount of a compound as claimed in any of claims 1-5.

9. A method for treating a disease or condition selected from uveitis, inflammatory peritonitis, osteoarthritis, pancreatitis, asthma, adult respiratory distress syndrome, glomerulonephritis, rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus, scleroderma, chronic thyroiditis, Grave's disease, autoimmune gastritis, diabetes, autoimmune hemolytic anemia, autoimmune neutropenia, thrombocytopenia, chronic active hepatitis, myasthenia gravis, inflammatory bowel disease, Crohn's disease, psoriasis, atopic dermatitis, scarring, graft vs host disease, organ transplant rejection, osteoporosis, leukemias and related disorders, myelodysplastic syndrome, multiple myeloma-related bone disorder, acute myelogenous leukemia, chronic myelogenous leukemia, metastatic melanoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, multiple myeloma, haemorrhagic shock, sepsis, septic shock, burns, Shigellosis, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease,

Huntington's disease, Kennedy's disease, prion disease, cerebral ischemia, epilepsy, myocardial ischemia, acute and chronic heart disease, myocardial infarction, congestive heart failure, atherosclerosis, coronary artery bypass graft, spinal muscular atrophy, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, multiple sclerosis, HIV-related encephalitis, aging, alopecia, neurological damage due to stroke, ulcerative colitis, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, hepatitis-B, hepatitis-C, hepatitis-G, yellow fever, dengue fever, or Japanese encephalitis, various forms of liver disease, renal disease, polyaptic kidney disease, H. pylori-associated gastric and duodenal ulcer disease, HIV infection, tuberculosis, meningitis, a treatment for complications associated with coronary artery bypass grafts, or an immunotherapy for the treatment of various forms of cancer, comprising administering to a mammal in need of such a treatment a therapeutically effective amount of a compound as claimed in any of claims 1-5.

10. A method of treating complications associated with coronary artery bypass grafts, comprising administering to a mammal in need of such a treatment a therapeutically effective amount of a compound as claimed in any of claims 1-5.

11. A method of preserving cells, said method comprising the step of bathing the cells in a solution of a compound as claimed in any of claims 1-5.

12. A method of preserving an organ for organ transplant or for preserving a blood product, comprising

the step of bathing the organ or blood product in a solution of a compound as claimed in any of claims 1-5..

13. A method of immunotherapy for the treatment of cancer, comprising administering to a mammal in need of such a treatment a therapeutically effective amount of a compound as claimed in any of claims 1-5.